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When a community deliberately desires power to be lodged in the hands of the majority of its own members, it will generally be found to have reached that stage of knowledge and civilization in which the government of the many is possible. The reaction which followed 1793 and 1848 in France was simply the sorrowful confession of the people that their political and moral education was not yet sufficiently advanced for a democratic republic. The efforts that some European politicians make, therefore, to stem the democratic tide, in the interest of society, remind us of those opponents of emancipation in this country who justified slaveholding on the ground that it helped the Almighty to fulfil his curse on the children of Ham. God may be safely left to see to the execution of his own decrees. He has not, we may be sure, committed society or civilization to the care either of church, or king, or the Universities, or the House of Commons, or any of the hundred little "leagues" and "associations" of sages which are constantly set on foot here and in England for the salvation of the deluded majority. We may say of democracy, as was once said of a still mightier movement, "If this counsel or work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it."

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#### ART. IX.—CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *History of the United States.* By GEORGE BANCROFT. Vol. IX. [*The American Revolution.* Vol. III.] Boston: Little, Brown, & Co. 1866.

MR. BANCROFT'S new volume, extending from July, 1776, to April, 1778, includes the crisis of the American Revolution. In point of style, it does not differ from its predecessors. It is marked by acuteness and rapidity, not infrequent felicities of figure and sentiment, and occasionally an impressive generalization. There are certainly, however, very grave defects in it, — words and sentences to tempt an easy criticism, statements to excite doubt or denial, and vaporous phrases to make one long for more simplicity of mind and pen.

The weakest parts of the work are its portraits. Mr. Bancroft paints what Mr. Palgrave calls an "external kind" of likeness. He hits the attitude of his subject, paints in the features warmly, throws in a variety of ornamentation, and leaves us contemplating a man sitting for his portrait, not a man in action. No brilliancy of color or antithesis can make up for imperfect perception of a nature, or imperfect analysis of its traits and powers. Mr. Bancroft's sketches of Washington are strong in expression, and many of them felicitous. But we do not get the insight into that great soul which is essential to understand, not only Washington, but the Revolution; and thus, while he is fully honored, he is not fully portrayed. On the other hand, the objects of censure — and there are a good many of them, English and American — are not so clearly delineated that we can judge from these pages alone whether they deserve the treatment they receive. In short, Mr. Bancroft seems to us to fail in doing justice to those whom he likes, as to those whom he dislikes, for want either of penetrating judgment or discriminating feeling.

He is more successful in narrative. The general progress of events is perfectly intelligible, and the different lines of the story are made to converge in points where their combinations are natural and effective. An animation often rising to fervor gives fresh interest to many incidents with which we are familiar, while others less generally known are brought out in striking aspects. By far the best chapters, to our apprehension, are those which treat of political topics. The fifteenth chapter, on "The Constitutions of the several States of America," is remarkably well written, and gives the volume claim to a high rank among the histories of the period. Some of the political disquisition is of doubtful value, and there are numerous assertions which should be modified; but considering the difficulty of the subject, the politics of the Revolution, or of that part embraced in this volume, are well handled.

With regard to the new material which Mr. Bancroft has employed, we are not distinctly informed. He speaks in the Preface of very full collections from the archives of England, France, and Prussia, of Hessian journals and reports derived from private sources, and of diplomatic documents from the governments of Europe, particularly from Spain. With these means, he approaches his subject with great advantages, and there is no reason to question his having used them advantageously. There are, however, some gaps in the treatment of the American relations with European powers; as, to take a single instance, respecting the part of Lafayette in forwarding the French alliance, which, it is very generally admitted, would have been delayed but for the exertions of that enthusiastic friend of our country. Whatever

the material Mr. Bancroft may have used for the first time, the general tenor of his history agrees with that of all the best preceding authorities.

He has formed some new judgments concerning individuals, but not, apparently, on grounds heretofore inaccessible. The animadversions upon General Greene will probably excite the most general attention. He is charged with holding Fort Washington in November, 1776, against the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief, and therefore with incurring the losses which ensued upon the capture of that fortress. He is again arraigned for causing the failure of the attack upon the British at Germantown, in October, 1777. These are serious accusations; and if they are sustained, one more name must be added to the list, already too long, of incompetent Revolutionary commanders. We question the possibility of sustaining them. Greene undoubtedly wished to hold Fort Washington when Washington preferred to have it evacuated; but Washington was willing to give him the opportunity, and if it turned out disastrously, the responsibility did not rest with Greene alone. In the battle of Germantown, Greene has always been described as acting with vigor and retaining control of himself and his troops, even after the sudden panic which was in no degree attributable to him, and which cost the Americans the victory they had unconsciously won. More might easily be said, if this were the proper occasion, in defence of one whom we have been taught to regard with something of the confidence given him by Washington after as well as before the losses of the fort and the battle. Irving is right, when speaking of the favor in which Greene stood with the Commander-in-Chief, in saying that "it arose from the abundant proofs Washington had received, in times of trial and difficulty, that he had a brave, affectionate heart, a sound head, and an efficient arm, on all of which he could thoroughly rely." \*

We are constantly struck, in reading Mr. Bancroft's volume, with the fact that the experiences of the late civil war help us to enter more fully into the experiences of the Revolution. We have been living over the lives of our fathers. Periods of elation and despondency, insufficient plans and their imperfect execution, personal and political intrigues, aversion toward the true leader and attraction toward the false, the jealousies of civil and military authorities, the mistakes of the government, the looking abroad for countenance, the disaffection of large numbers at home, and through all the unerring fidelity of the

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\* Life of Washington, Vol. III. p. 361. Since these remarks were written, Mr. George W. Greene has published a complete and satisfactory vindication of General Greene against the charges and insinuations of Mr. Bancroft.

loyal people,—these are things with which we have been familiar in our time, and we go back to them in the elder time with greater capacity of comprehending them there. It is to Mr. Bancroft's credit that he has so understood the events around him as to be able to avail himself of the present in interpreting the past. We follow him with all the greater confidence, as well as the greater interest.

Just as the inspiration of the national cause in our recent struggle was political rather than military, and loyalty to our principles was the motive which animated our councils, filled and refilled our armies, and led us on, through all misconceptions and reverses, to the regeneration of the Union, so in our fathers' conflict it was the resolve to maintain their liberties that enabled them to work out the national salvation. Merely military impulse would have exhausted itself; even the endurance of the brave soldier and the devotion of the incomparable leader would have failed, but for the constant support of political principles, which, whether the battle was lost or won, were equally inspiring. For though they were political, they were also moral, and they rested upon foundations older than the nation, older even than man himself, because laid by the Divine hand. Mr. Bancroft remarks, that, "of the American statesmen who assisted to frame the new government, not one had been originally a republican." But the system of almost all the thirteen Colonies had been virtually, if not titularly, republican, and the mere insubstantial pageant of the monarchy which they had respected faded almost without the lifting of a finger. Besides, it was not republicanism merely for which American statesmen contended, but the law of right, the fundamental law of equity and liberty. It was the same with American soldiers. When Baron Steuben came to Valley Forge, in the early part of 1778, and saw the suffering in those sad winter quarters, he said that no army in Europe could be kept together for a month in such a state of trial. The whole nation, or the whole patriotic portion of it, felt the majesty of their cause, and it consoled them in their sorrows, quickened them in their struggles, and elevated them in their aims. Mr. Bancroft quotes the charge of Jay, first Chief Justice of New York, to the grand jury at Kingston, in September, 1777, when Burgoyne was threatening on the North and Howe on the South, and the sky was dark in every quarter: "Free, mild, and equal government begins to rise. Divine Providence has made the tyranny of princes instrumental in breaking the chains of their subjects. Whoever compares our present with our former constitution will admit that all the calamities incident to this war will be amply compensated by the many blessings flowing from this glorious revolution, which in its rise and progress is distinguished by so

many marks of the Divine favor and interposition, that no doubt can remain of its being finally accomplished."

The political inspiration of the Revolution embodied itself, so far as institutions were concerned, in those of the States rather than the nation. Mr. Bancroft, in a chapter already commended, points out the principles on which the State Constitutions were formed, laying stress upon freedom of worship as their chief corner-stone, and describing the right of suffrage and its qualifications, the organization of the legislative, executive, and judicial offices, the similarity of which throughout the country was not only a sign of unanimity in these matters, but a presage of unanimity upon those relating to the general government. This, it need not be confessed, was still in embryo. Massachusetts entered upon her State organization in 1775; eight other States established theirs in 1776, and two more in 1777; Rhode Island and Connecticut remaining content with the institutions developed under their charters. It was not till near the close of 1777 that Congress adopted the "Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union between the States," and not till more than three years afterward that the States accepted them, and a national government was set up, at least in form. Throughout the period embraced in Mr. Bancroft's volume, the critical period of the Revolution, the only government of the nation was in Congress, "a nominal head," as Washington called it, without departments, without resources, without the power to tax, or to raise an army, or to do anything in its proper province, except to keep up the show of a navy and to make as much of diplomacy as Europe would allow. The Confederation, when adopted, professed to be nothing more than a league of States, "a firm league," according to the second article, and according to the thirteenth, not to be altered, "unless such alteration be agreed to in a Congress of the United States, and be afterwards confirmed by the Legislature of every State." This was certainly not State sovereignty, neither was it national sovereignty. Like the prophet's day that was "not day nor night," the Confederation was not a general government, for it rendered Congress even weaker than before by requiring a majority of nine States, instead of the former majority of seven, for the adoption of a measure; and not a government of independent States, for it took from them all "power, jurisdiction, and right . . . expressly delegated to the United States in Congress assembled." No wonder that Hamilton insisted, even before the articles were ratified, that Congress must assert itself, either "by resuming and exercising the discretionary powers originally vested in them," or "by calling immediately a convention of all the States, with full authority to conclude finally upon a general confederation."

Mr. Bancroft says something to explain the imperfections of the national organization. "For more than a century, and even from the very foundation of the settlements, almost every English administration had studied to acquire the disposal of their military resources and their revenues, while every American Legislature had had for its constant object the repression of the encroachments of the crown. This antagonism, developed and confirmed by successive generations, had become the quick instinct and fixed habit of the people." (p. 48.) "The confederacy was formed under the influence of political ideas which had been developed by a contest of centuries for individual and local liberties against an irresponsible central authority. Now that power passed to the people, new institutions were required strong enough to protect the state, while they should leave untouched the liberties of the individual. But America, misled by what belonged to the past, took for her organizing principle the principle of resistance to power, which in all the thirteen Colonies had been hardened into stubbornness by a succession of common jealousies and troubles." (p. 437.) But we must go beyond this in explaining the weakness of the Confederation. It was a jealousy not so much of the crown as of one another that had wrought upon the Colonies, and then upon the States, until the idea of a government in which some of them might get an advantage over the rest, or any one might have greater influence than any other, was something like the Scarlet Woman of the old controversialists, ablaze with peril and with wrong. The differences between State and State, sometimes local, sometimes social, sometimes industrial, and in all cases rather aggravated than allayed by the trials of the time, were the great hindrances to a national power. Only Washington, or a spirit kindred to his, could claim that "all distinctions are sunk in the name of an American," and even he soon found that it was vain to press the claim.

The obstinacy of the States in insisting upon their separate rights and liberties was not without a certain advantage. While they would have done far better to stand abreast, and meet the foe as with the heart of one man, it was not without effect that they confronted him, almost singly. "The self-asserting individuality," says Mr. Bancroft, "of every State and of every citizen, though it forbade the organization of an efficient government with executive unity, imposed on Britain the impossible task of conquering them one by one." As Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia said after the defeat on Long Island, "We have lost a battle and a small island, but we have not lost a State. Or why should we be discouraged even if we had lost a State? If there were but one State left, still that one should peril all for independence."

So Major Shaw, after the battle of Germantown: "Were I to see twelve of the United States overrun by our cruel invaders, I should still believe the thirteenth would not only save itself, but also work out the deliverance of the others."

With all this, it is impossible not to regret the want of unity, the want, it may be termed, of consistency with the principles for which the Americans were in arms. Distrustful of one another, divided against themselves, they were so far unfaithful to the cause of human rights; for that is a cause to which justice can never be fully done while its supporters are contending with one another. Our fathers paid the penalty of their wranglings. Their political history is full of warning against allowing a government to be formed out of just as little material as may keep up an appearance of authority, and no more. Not only did the nation suffer as a whole, but every part of it; every State, every township, was the worse, politically, for the mere shell that had been fashioned and called a Confederation. But it is in the military annals of the period that we most clearly see the consequences of so defective a national organization. The half-recruited, half-officered, half-provided armies, the intrigues among generals, the quarrels among troops, the disaffection of large masses of the inhabitants, the constant discouragements, the frequent suggestions of submission not only from individuals but from States, the quickness to doubt and condemn, to try new expedients and new leaders, to forsake even Washington for such as Lee or Gates, and; more than all, the overwhelming proofs which Congress was accumulating against itself of its unfitness to conduct the war, and of the unfitness that was increasing instead of diminishing with experience, — these all were crying for relief, and crying in vain.

In fact, our fathers had to form their lines on two fronts, the one against an enemy in arms, the other against an unarmed but not less dangerous array of the captious, the suspicious, and the disaffected among themselves. "I begin to fear," wrote Lafayette to Washington at the close of 1777, "that America may be lost by herself and her own sons." It was somewhat the same with Great Britain. George III., as is well known, insisted on prosecuting the war after its issue was clear, not merely to punish his revolted colonists, but to humble the opposition in England. But the divisions among the Americans were far more serious in themselves, and far more embarrassing to their leaders. A strong government would not have prevented them from existing; but it would have prevented their existence from threatening the life of the nation.

Yet, notwithstanding all dissensions and weaknesses, the conquest of



America was impracticable. Impracticable territorially, because the country was too remote from Great Britain, and too vast in itself to be overrun by British armies. Impracticable politically, because the United States, however imperfect their union, were still united, while their strength, perpetually renewed by their cause, could not be exhausted within the limits of any war which the foe could wage against them. Moreover, it was a contest of Englishmen with Englishmen; and Englishmen on the side of tyranny could not subdue Englishmen on the side of liberty, except by a combination of circumstances morally and physically impossible. Mr. Bancroft quotes from the memoir read to Louis XVI. by the Count de Vergennes, as early as August, 1776: "Now that the United States have declared their independence, there is no chance of conciliation unless supernatural events should force them to bend under the yoke, or the English to recognize their independence."

To these considerations we may add, without exaggeration, the impracticability of conquering such a leader and such a people as were engaged in the Revolution. "I cannot hope," wrote Washington from Valley Forge to Patrick Henry, "that my services have been the best; but my heart tells me they have been the best that I could render." Washington's best was more than a match for his inferior opponents, had their resources been a hundred times greater, or his a hundred times less. Nor were the American people unequal to their responsibilities. Their very foes became enthusiastic in describing them. "The great bulk of the country," wrote Burgoyne, "is undoubtedly with the Congress in principle and zeal, and their measures are executed with a secrecy and despatch that are not to be equalled." "They stood like soldiers," wrote the Hessian Schlözer from the field of Saratoga, "and with a military air in which there was but little to find fault with. . . . Nay, more, all the lads that stood there in rank and file, kind Nature had formed so trim, so slender, so nervous, that it was a pleasure to look at them, and we were all surprised at the sight of such a handsome, well-formed race."

Thus much was decided before the treaty with France, at the close of the period embraced in Mr. Bancroft's volume, that Great Britain could not conquer America. The French alliance undoubtedly hastened, but as undoubtedly it did not decide, the recognition of American independence. To this termination of the strife there were many obstacles, some of which a careless or desponding judgment would have pronounced insuperable, but none that were not in course of yielding to the deep and resistless impulse in favor of liberty. A greater crisis than that through which the Americans had passed could hardly befall them, nor could any, greater or less, be more heroically met than this had been, by all who were worthy of their name.